



## **Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Memories: Implications for Teacher Education**

**By Sandra J. Balli**

Teacher education research has long understood that pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching are well established by the time they enroll in a teacher education program. (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Levin & He, 2008; Lortie, 1975; Mead 1992; Nespor, 1987; Wilson, 1990). Indeed, no other profession can claim the "apprenticeship of observation" that the teaching profession affords (Lortie, 1975). Stemming from memories collected through 12+ years of observing their own teachers, pre-service teachers can come to regard classroom teaching as natural, requiring no additional training (Ball & Forzani, 2009). This presents teacher educators with a dilemma. Charged with disseminating accepted theories and methods of effective teaching, teacher educators carry out their work in the face of students who, guided by years of memories, filter and interpret teacher education coursework according to their preconceived beliefs about how to teach (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Goodman, 1988).

Based on the understanding that teacher memories help shape pre-service teachers' beliefs, teacher educators have sought ways to both honor such memories and facilitate a reflective dialog that analyzes those memories in light of accepted theories and methods that comprise teacher education coursework (Ayers, 1993; Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002).

---

Sandra J. Balli is a professor in the School of Education at La Sierra University, Riverside, California. [sballi@lasierra.edu](mailto:sballi@lasierra.edu)

---

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories***

---

In the updated preface to his distinctive work, *Schoolteacher* (1975; 2002), Lortie suggested that facilitating such a dialog could begin by asking pre-service teachers to write about their former teachers, thus making their memories and beliefs explicit and available for analysis.

To that end, this study drew from a larger qualitative study that examined 148 pre-service teachers' handwritten narrative memories about a past teacher (kindergarten through college) who, from the pre-service teacher's perspective, demonstrated excellence in the classroom and thus helped shape individual beliefs about good teaching. The narratives included memories of good teachers that spanned all grade levels, kindergarten through college, and a wide spectrum of content areas. Although they were not prompted to do so, about one in every four pre-service teachers used juxtaposition as a writing device to contrast their memories of good teachers with descriptions of poor teachers, perhaps to further demonstrate excellence through dichotomy.

### **Purpose**

The current study centered on the juxtaposition phenomenon that emerged from the larger collection of written narrative memories. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the good/poor teacher juxtapositions to consider how such dichotomous memories can be used to guide pre-service teachers in analyzing the complexities of teaching and teacher behaviors.

### **Related Literature**

The related literature examines how past teachers serve as role models for pre-service teachers, how symbolic interaction theory (i.e., assigning meaning to encounters) relates to pre-service teachers' developing beliefs, and how juxtaposed memories can create a cognitive dissonance that triggers dichotomous understandings of good and poor teaching practice.

#### **Role Theory**

Role theory defines a person's role as the functions a person characteristically performs within a social context (Biddle, 1979). It follows then that we develop expectations for the characteristic roles and functions of people in our society based on observation and experience. For example, we have an idea of what to expect from encounters with doctors, lawyers, or teachers. We hold these expectations based on our understanding of a particular role and the typical behavior of persons who occupy that role. According to Biddle, when an encounter with someone exceeds our role expectations, we are caught off guard and pleasantly satisfied. Likewise, when an encounter goes contrary to our role expectations, we become frustrated or disillusioned. Such experiences can fuel dichotomous understandings of the "best" and "worst" models for a particular role.

To be sure, we hold certain expectations for the role of teachers. Students, in particular, hold yearly expectations for their new teachers based on numerous encounters they have had with previous teachers. On the surface, students expect teachers to provide information, organize learning materials, and administer discipline. Harbored within their general role expectations, students evaluate specific interactions with a teacher, ascertaining whether an interaction exceeded, met, or countered their expectations. Thus, students sort teachers, making a personal judgment about which teachers are better than others (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005).

### ***Symbolic Interaction Theory***

Symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969) asserts that people assign meanings to specific interactions with other people. In the realm of students and their teachers, assigning meanings to specific interactions with a teacher is typically based on a student's incomplete or simplistic knowledge. Indeed, students are not privy to the thought processes, challenges, or underlying issues that teachers carry with them into every interaction in the classroom. Students only know what they have experienced. Although pre-service teachers have interacted with teachers for about 13,000 hours by the time they graduate from high school, they have not been pressed to take an analytic stance toward those experiences. Consequently, they have an incomplete basis with which to fully understand and evaluate the complexities of teaching (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Lortie, 1975). For pre-service teachers, however, memories drawn from a continuum of good and poor teacher role models have helped shape beliefs that are a viable reality for them. Pre-service teachers don't necessarily distinguish their beliefs as "student perspectives," to be held in abeyance until their education in the theories and methods of teaching allows them to analyze their beliefs from a "professional perspective" (Lortie, 1975).

### ***Beliefs about Teaching***

The opportunity to learn from and interact with teachers for 12+ years paints a broad brush stroke across all student beliefs. For pre-service teachers' in particular, such beliefs have colored their understanding of the teaching profession by the time they make the decision to enter the profession (Nespor, 1987; Wilson, 1990). Levin and He (2008) found that the single most important source for pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching comes from their previous experiences with teachers rather than from teacher education coursework. In truth, teacher educators may be viewed as simply additional members of a professional group from which pre-service teachers have already identified their current beliefs about teaching.

Extrapolating from social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), previous experiences with teachers can mold a vision of teaching from which pre-service teachers draw as they contemplate their own future practice. With their vision in place, pre-service teachers tend to screen teacher education coursework, internalizing some theories and methods and rejecting others, anchoring their beliefs in memories about "real

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories***

---

teachers” on the job (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Goodman, 1988; Lortie, 1975; 2002; Mead, 2002). Established over time, beliefs about who and what pre-service teachers want to emulate stand in juxtaposed contrast to beliefs about who and what they do not want to emulate.

#### **Juxtaposed Memories**

Juxtaposition is a device that places descriptions, ideas, or images next to one another especially for purposes of comparison or contrast (Clark, 2005). Consider the following stark examples: a photograph of the American flag juxtaposed amid the World Trade Center debris; a description of African slaves as “bound and bleeding” at the foot of “civilized humanity” in the literary classic, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Stowe, 1852); a film’s instrumental quartet rendition of *Nearer My God to Thee* while the frigid ocean swallows the Titanic (Cameron & Landau, 1997).

Juxtaposed descriptions, ideas, or images gain strength and significance when contemplating the dichotomous contrast. In the teaching profession, for example, we can readily retrieve memories of an engaging, enthusiastic teacher in juxtaposition to equally vivid memories of a dull, boring lecturer. The effect creates an unsettling dissonance (Festinger, 1957) forcing a pause, like a long comma, to contemplate incongruities that feed our beliefs about good teachers and poor ones. What is accomplished from such juxtaposed memories? According to Clark (2005), the purpose of juxtaposition is realized when we analyze descriptions, ideas, or images for underlying meanings, and allow new insights to emerge as the juxtaposition is pondered, challenged, critiqued, and resolved. And thus, in the teacher education classroom, juxtaposed teacher descriptions might also be a vehicle for dialog, reflection, and new insight.

#### **Literature Summary**

Pre-service teachers who enroll in a teacher education program do so with already established beliefs about teaching. If we apply notions from role theory (Biddle, 1979) and symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969), we could say that pre-service teachers’ have a sense of personal reality about good and poor teaching based on years of assigning meaning to specific interactions they have had with teacher role models.

Over time, such interactions collect in a memory bank that shapes how pre-service teachers filter teacher education coursework based on what they do and do not want to emulate in their future teaching practice (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Goodman, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Mead, 2002). According to Nespor (1987), some memories about teachers are particularly vivid and striking—rich images of deeply held beliefs. If vivid memories include striking juxtapositions of good teachers and poor teachers, these dichotomous memories provide opportunities for analysis and for building shared understandings about the complexities of teaching.

## **Method**

### ***Qualitative Research***

Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on a methodological tradition that explores a social or human problem. Qualitative researchers elicit the perspectives of research participants about a phenomenon without reducing their perspectives to numbers. Rather, the qualitative researcher engages in a process of reflection and interpretation.

Phenomenology is one of five approaches to qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology involves gathering descriptions of participants' experiences in lived contexts. The thoughts of participants are kept intact and recognized as crucial to the phenomenon under study. The phenomenological approach allows each participant's experience to be considered independently and with equal value toward understanding the phenomenon.

### ***Participants***

Data for this qualitative study were collected from 148 pre-service teacher education students enrolled in two sections of an introductory teacher education course at a research university. The 148 pre-service teachers included 117 females (78%) and 31 male students (22%) which roughly approximates the distribution of female and male teachers nationwide, 84% and 16% respectively (Feistritzer, 2011). Of the female pre-service teachers, 68 were elementary education majors, 48 were secondary education majors representing various content areas, and one identified herself only as female. Of the male pre-service teachers, seven were elementary education majors, and 24 were secondary education majors representing various content areas. The pre-service teachers volunteered to participate in a class activity intended to inform research about good teachers and their practices. Those who did not wish to participate were free to leave the classroom.

### ***Data Source***

During the first week of the introductory course, the pre-service teacher volunteers were asked to reflect upon all of their past teachers and to select one teacher from their experience as students in kindergarten through college who they considered to be a good teacher. Students were not given a definition, but were reminded to focus on good teaching rather than popularity, and were asked to recall a specific episode that would concretely demonstrate the reasons for their choice. The students did not confer with one another about their teacher selections.

The students were each given a form requesting their demographic information (i.e., elementary or secondary program, subject area if secondary, and gender) and demographics of the chosen teacher (i.e., grade level, middle or secondary subject area, and gender). The students used the rest of the blank form to handwrite an episodic memory about the chosen teacher. The narratives ranged in length from

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories***

---

two paragraphs to two pages. Written narrative was chosen as a data collection method because it offered quiet time for reflection and a medium for rich, descriptive language (Van Manen, 1989; Weber, 1991).

#### ***Data Analysis Procedures***

The 148 pre-service teachers were each assigned a pseudonym to separately identify their narratives. As the primary researcher, I read the handwritten narratives several times for a general sense of content and use of descriptive language. Subsequently, I arranged for the handwritten narratives to be word processed and I read the narratives several times again.

I entered the word processed narratives into *NVivo7*, a qualitative software package that supports content analysis of text-based data through text unit coding (QSR International Pty. Ltd., 2006). I selected text units for coding based on rich description and a clear, powerful, and/or a succinct narrative reference to a teacher or some aspect of classroom life. Text units ranged in length from two sentences to a paragraph.

I organized patterns that emerged from each coded text unit into categories and subsequently, themes. Next, my research assistant independently read the narratives and manually developed a list of themes. Finally, my research assistant and I compared electronic and manual analyses for differing themes and understandings. We discussed and resolved discrepancies, generally involving how the themes were labeled rather than how their substance was depicted. I added one theme to the larger study based on these discussions.

The current study focused on one phenomenon from the larger study; that of juxtaposed, dichotomous teacher descriptions that emerged in many of the narratives. The juxtaposed contrasting descriptions did not necessarily pervade the entire narrative, but they offered brief glimpses of pre-service teachers' beliefs about good and poor teachers.

## **Results**

As indicated earlier, the episodic memories, collected from pre-service teachers, included memories of good teachers that spanned all grade levels, kindergarten through college, and a wide spectrum of content areas. Although they were not prompted to do so, about one in every four pre-service teachers used juxtaposition as a writing device to contrast their memories of good teachers with descriptions of poor teacher qualities. The results include 28 juxtaposed excerpts clustered into eight themes around two categories of teacher characteristics.

The first category represents teacher *pedagogical characteristics* and included four themes: (theme 1) Teachers who spend time with students juxtaposed with busy or preoccupied teachers; (theme 2) Interesting teachers juxtaposed with boring teachers; (theme 3) Teachers with high expectations juxtaposed with lax teachers;

and (theme 4) Teachers who are open to change juxtaposed with ridged teachers. The second category represented teacher *personal characteristics* and included four themes: (theme 5) Teachers who respect students juxtaposed with teachers who do not; (theme 6) Humble teachers juxtaposed with arrogant teachers; (theme 7) Caring teachers juxtaposed with indifferent or judgmental teachers; and (theme 8) Composed teachers juxtaposed with angry teachers. For clarification, the juxtaposed description of poor pedagogy or poor personal characteristics is italicized in each excerpt, and the pre-service teacher pseudonym is bracketed after each excerpt.

**Category 1: Teacher Pedagogical Characteristics**

Theme 1: Teachers who spend time with students juxtaposed with busy or preoccupied teachers.

*Excerpt 1.* Even though I liked school and was a sincere student, I was terrified of any kind of math or science. Mr. G. crossed the line from teaching math and physics to teaching students. He realized that some of us struggled in his classes. *Unlike some teachers who are willing to let their students fall by the wayside*, Mr. G. took an interest in each of us. I can't recall a single time when Mr. G. was "too busy" to help me. He treated his students as human beings, not *prisoners within his classroom*. [Heather]

*Excerpt 2.* Mr. M conquered the *8 a.m.-3 p.m. teacher syndrome*. It was standard for him to arrive early and leave late. From my first course as a freshman, I could see a fire in him to teach. [Alex]

*Excerpt 3.* He would *eat lunch with US—not always in the teachers' lounge*. He would stick around after school for any student who wanted to talk. [Vicky]

In the first excerpt, the phrase "fall by the wayside" evokes an image of students left to navigate their educational journey alone, as if stuck in a ditch without help. From a student perspective, the words "willing to let their students fall," suggests teacher indifference to student needs. From a teacher perspective, however, the possible forces that converge, such as class size and curriculum completion, suggest the underlying complexities inherent in leading the student journey.

Likewise, the phrases "8 a.m.-3 p.m. teacher syndrome" and "lunch in the teacher's lounge" suggest inadequate teacher time on the job. Such scrutiny of teacher time has long accompanied the teaching profession (e.g., workday ends at 3:00 p.m. with summers off). In my experience, it is not until pre-service teachers participate in field experiences, that they begin to internalize what teachers do professionally before school, during lunch, after school, and in the evenings. Along with that insight, the words or mannerisms with which teachers signal that they do or do not have time for students makes balancing the demands of the profession a practical reality with which to grapple.

Theme 2: Engaging teachers juxtaposed with boring teachers.

---

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories***

---

*Excerpt 1.* She addressed controversial topics to spark discussion and debate in her classroom. She demanded her students to think about tough moral issues with her essay tests and long-term projects. She made us interested in the subject, rather than just *regurgitating colorless theories and facts*. [Faith]

*Excerpt 2.* Very few “busy work” assignments were ever made. We were constantly doing projects and cooperative activities. It was a hard class but we had a good time and learned a lot. The lessons and daily lectures were *not just the teacher standing up and spewing facts* but rather an interactive conversation. Everything we did as a class had a purpose. Those purposes were always made clear to us. [Margaret]

*Excerpt 3.* My sixth grade art teacher stands out in my mind. He actually taught us real things about art, *not just Christmas projects and St. Patrick's Day clovers*. He gave me my first glimpse of art as a serious subject in school. [Olivia]

A class session in which a teacher “regurgitates” and “spews colorless facts” following up with “busy work” summons an image of a boring presentation with a teacher consumed in covering content rather than engaging students. From a student perspective, a long lecture void of colorful enthusiasm, bright visual aids, and stimulating discussion can trigger tuning the brain to another channel. A teacher’s perspective might view the “facts” as important basic knowledge inherent in the content and lecture delivery as the most efficient way to deliver such knowledge.

Likewise, the student who recalls “real things” instruction suggests the essential strategy of relevance and weeding the extraneous from the serious. The comments further call attention to pre-service teachers about the value of building a repertoire of “real things” learning experiences across grade levels and subject areas.

Theme 3: Teachers with high expectations juxtaposed with lax teachers.

*Excerpt 1.* She had a very good talent for being able to explain concepts in a way that anyone was able to understand. If they didn’t, she was patient with helping them grasp it. There needs to be more teachers like this *rather than ones who are just there with no purpose*. [Abigail]

*Excerpt 2.* We knew exactly what we were expected to learn. Her objectives were very clear. I do not like *teachers who are vague* (i.e. “*You’ll need to know some information from Chapter 6.*”) It causes students to know a little about a lot of material. I remember things easier if I know exactly what I need to know. [Natalie]

*Excerpt 3.* I remember when I first came to the university, I had a really hard time going to my classes because they were all long lectures and *the teacher never noticed if you were there or not, especially since he or she was always looking down at notes to lead the class*. My second semester I had one of my greatest teachers. I admired this particular teacher so much because the very first day of class he made it very clear that we were to attend every time and be caught up on our reading so as to participate in class discussion. I know that *many professors have the attitude that we have made the decision to attend college and we must*

### **Sandra J. Balli**

---

*personally make the decision to go to class and to learn.* With this teacher, his love of the subject and his confidence in his ability to make an impact on our education was expressed to us on that first day of class. [Beverly]

The energy and presence required of teachers designated as good is evident in the words “purpose” and “made it very clear.” In the larger study, from which juxtaposed data for the current study emerged, there was a prevailing theme of high expectations. Indeed, not one of the 148 pre-service teacher essays described a good teacher as easy. Throughout the grade levels and across the curriculum students expected to be pressed to learn aided by clarity (“we knew exactly what was expected”) in content delivery and requirements (“be caught up on reading and participate”). Decisions to attend class and learn were not left up to students. Students took positive note of teachers who held them accountable.

Theme 4: Rigid teachers juxtaposed with teachers who are open to change.

*Excerpt 1.* I have had the opportunity to return to her class. One of the things I noticed was that she had changed her teaching methods to meet the needs of the children. *Too many seasoned teachers are set in their ways and teach as they did twenty years ago.* Only those that truly care about children and their education modify their methods. [Hannah]

*Excerpt 2.* Mrs. R exposed us to a wide variety of methods for teaching reading. This was helpful because it gave me an opportunity to decide which methods I support as well as giving me the knowledge base that is necessary. This aspect of her teaching stands out in my mind as exceptional *because many methods course teachers tend to only focus on the methods they most support.* [Mia]

Novice teachers navigate their first five year teaching cycle with an eye toward establishing routines and curriculum activities to comfortably repeat in ensuing years. As a result, preparation time diminishes lending balance to their professional and personal lives. From a teacher perspective, what worked in the past likely seems workable in the present.

However, the preceding student perspective highlights the notion of continued growth as exemplified by good teachers. Students’ recognition of stale methods calls for thoughtful reflection about integrating a variety of methods to engage new generations of students.

### **Category 2: Teacher Personal Characteristics**

Theme 5: Teachers who respect students and teachers who do not.

*Excerpt 1.* There was a boy in our class who had coke-bottle glasses and buck teeth but yet he was not made fun of. I believe this is because Mrs. H treated him with respect. The boy was really cool—or at least I thought he was, and as far as I remember so did everyone else. I believe he was given a chance to really develop despite his looks. Most kids would have been making fun of him and the *typical teacher would just let this kind of treatment slide.* Mrs. H would not and did not let this happen. [Becky]

### **Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories**

---

*Excerpt 2.* Mr. M never made any of us *feel stupid or inferior* in any way. *Sometimes teachers will say little things that make students feel dumb*, but Mr. M never did... That class to this day is the only class I've ever been in where no one was *afraid to ask questions*. They knew that he respected their questions and opinions. He made everything comfortable. I haven't been in a classroom like his since then. [Jacob]

*Excerpt 3.* Mr. Mc talked to his students at the adult level. You never *felt stupid or like you were being talked down to*. I hope that I can also treat my students the way he treated us—with respect, dedication, fairness and love. [Brandy]

*Excerpt 4.* She was the first teacher who I felt saw me as a person—an independent entity—and *not part of a group or a teenager or an adolescent*—but as a person who had something to give her. [Jocelyn]

*Excerpt 5.* He treated us like we had a *brain in our head*, gave us responsibilities and allowed us to take control of our own learning. I believe he was a student as well in some ways because he asked us our opinions, wondered how we solved certain problems and always supported our thinking. His classroom was open enough that we felt like taking risks. [Amy]

*Excerpt 6.* I've had a lot of good teachers, but there's one that stands out in my mind. First of all, she had great interpersonal skills. She treated us like other people instead of *students she could walk on*. She had respect for us and treated us like adults. [Melanie]

These six excerpts illustrate that students and teachers coexist in classrooms of imperfect people breeding an assortment of irritations that can facilitate disharmony. Teachers who successfully navigated the relationship challenges inherent in classroom life were recognized as good by many students.

Indeed, student memories suggested that personal characteristics were at least as important, if not more so, than pedagogical skills. The clear message was that despite their younger age, students respected teachers who respected them as if they were an “independent entity” with worth like an adult peer. Students did not respond in a learning environment where they perceived that teachers “walk on students” or question whether students have a “brain in their head.” Instead, the picture emerges of a classroom that feels safe for “asking questions” knowing that a teacher will not make them “feel dumb” for asking.

Theme 6: Humble teachers juxtaposed with arrogant teachers.

*Excerpt 1.* He actually thought his students knew something and placed a high value on their thoughts. I think that *too often teachers tend to think their job is to know everything and that their way of thinking is the only correct way*. It seemed to me that he was less concerned about the “factual” information we retained and more concerned with his students validating their answers. [April]

*Excerpt 2.* One of the reasons that I respected him most was that one time he generalized the effect of social groups on eating disorders and used sororities as

### **Sandra J. Balli**

---

the target for his generalization. I disagreed with his statement, wrote him a polite letter about it, and he apologized for what he said in front of the class. *I was shocked that a teacher would ever admit he was wrong in front of the class.* [Nancy]

*Excerpt 3.* Speaking for myself and probably the rest of his students, you could talk to Mr. S about anything. He wasn't *up on the pedestal that many teachers seem to be on*. He talked about things that we wanted to talk about. I believe that *he wasn't there just for a paycheck* because he had such a great time teaching. [James]

*Excerpt 4.* She was not one to talk down to people. She shared her knowledge in a non-arrogant, non-boastful way. Not in an "*I know everything attitude*" like some teachers. [Kara]

*Excerpt 5.* Mrs. P wasn't *one of these teachers who tried to impress her students by being "cool" or "one of us."* Mrs. P was the same age as our moms and the great thing about her was that while she wasn't "a kid" and she wasn't a mom (a real drag in junior high!), she was the best of both. [Danielle]

Similar to the previous theme, this theme also highlights the desire for respect in interpersonal relationships. Teachers who believe that they must reflect a persona of "knowing everything" in order to do their job well tend to misunderstand that facilitating student learning may mean allowing students to enlighten teachers from the perspective and accumulated learning discoveries of students. In climbing down from the "pedestal" position, there will likely be circumstances that necessitate a teacher apology to the class. Excerpt 2 implies that teacher apologies come few and far between which belies all that a teacher might gain from doing so.

### Theme 7: Caring teachers juxtaposed with indifferent teachers.

*Excerpt 1.* High school is a hard time for students because there are so many self-esteem issues that come into play. When I was a sophomore, I had been suspended for the first four days of school. I was mortified. Mrs. R acknowledged my absence without *scorn or judgment*. She conferred with me at various times and only displayed faith in my abilities. She often challenged me, and rewarded my efforts with praise and my failures with support and advice. [Kim]

*Excerpt 2.* As a freshman, I was out sick, because I had cancer. *I am afraid to say that some of my teachers were not sure how to handle the situation.* Some teachers said lots and some teachers didn't say anything. However, my English teacher was supportive without being overbearing. [Kelly]

*Excerpt 3.* I was what *teachers might say—a very badly behaved student*. I was on the honor roll every semester but I also *was usually in some trouble*. Then I came to be a student under Mrs. C. She saw that I really wasn't a *bad kid*, I was just bored. So, she started letting me help tutor other students, grade papers, and just keep busy. She showed me that there are many children that just need individualized direction or some extra motivation. [Mackenzie]

These excerpts highlight student recognition of feeling judged for childish or

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories***

---

deliberate mistakes by poor teacher models who revealed inadvertently that they sorted students into good kids and bad kids. Students themselves seemed to know that being “in some trouble” called for caring and support rather than a label.

According to one student, teacher caring can also mean acknowledging a student’s personal crisis even when stumbling to choose the right words. This appears preferable to avoiding the issue when handling “the situation” feels uncomfortable. A teacher might possibly be one of the few adults in a student’s life who offers the kind of caring that students need.

Theme 8: Composed teachers juxtaposed with angry teachers.

*Excerpt 1.* One of the teachers I remember most growing up was my kindergarten teacher. Probably because it was my first experience with school and second because she was a patient and soft spoken teacher. She never yelled at us or did much punishment. [Kate]

*Excerpt 2.* I don’t really remember her ever getting angry or punishing us. We all were well behaved because she kept our attention and made learning fun. No two days were ever the same. I probably learned more that year than any other year in elementary school. [Amanda]

*Excerpt 3.* We were all equals. Mr. J never yelled at any of us for being immature. Whenever I had a problem I would not hesitate to have him help me. Every day I learned something new from him which is hard for me to say since the majority of my classes were not very educational. [Erin]

The preceding excerpts reflect classroom management strategies juxtaposing a calm demeanor with an angry one. Terms such as “yelling” and “punishment,” depicting an angry demeanor, seemed to block the kind of “learning” and “fun” present in the excellent teacher’s classroom.

A response to student problems, characterized by anger and frustration, can occasionally, or frequently, occur in any classroom where 30 students and a teacher converge with their differing personalities and needs. Just as students are not privy to pressures that contribute to teacher anger, so teachers may not recognize reasons that underlie student misbehavior.

## **Discussion and Implications**

The pre-service teachers in this study were asked to write an episodic memory of a good teacher to inform research on pre-service teachers’ beliefs about the characteristics of such teachers. While writing, one in four pre-service teachers also juxtaposed striking descriptions of poor teacher qualities even though they were not prompted to do so.

In referring to pedagogical skills, pre-service teachers used striking descriptors to juxtapose memories of good skills with poor skills. Phrases such as “fall by the wayside,” “spewing facts,” “set in their ways,” and “prisoners in a classroom,”

---

*Sandra J. Balli*

---

demonstrate with stark contrast the depth of feeling with which pre-service teachers infused their beliefs. Bringing those descriptors to light, and examining them closely, offers an opportunity to dialog about pedagogical practices, how pedagogy is developed, and the underlying meanings that hinder or contribute to orchestrating classroom learning.

Referring to personal teacher characteristics, excerpts implied that pre-service teachers observed teachers who made them feel stupid, treated them as if they had “no brain,” were judgmental, “sat on a pedestal,” or chose not to apologize. Attitudes of respect or disrespect, judgment or non-judgmental regard, and arrogance or humility are examples of character qualities manifested in student-teacher relationships.

Although pre-service teachers may hold an ideal image of themselves as good teachers, able to build quality relationships with students, it is useful for them to examine their own personal character qualities and attitudes. They can explore how underlying pressures converge on teachers to elicit character flaws, and reflect on how their own character qualities could be manifested both positively and negatively in the classroom.

In the preface to the second edition of his book, *Schoolteacher*, Lortie (2002) described the growing and useful trend toward reflection as a tool in teacher education. In advocating reflection, Lortie suggested that pre-service teachers make their beliefs explicit by writing about former teachers, reflecting on meanings, and integrating their reflections with concepts learned in teacher education coursework. With this in mind, consider the following three implications for teacher educators to use juxtaposed memories in their reflective work with pre-service teachers.

**Press for an Analytic Stance**

Because pre-service teachers do not normally take an analytic stance toward their memories of past teachers (Lortie, 1975), teacher educators must press pre-service teachers to dismantle dichotomous memories and analyze former teachers’ practices, good and poor, for underlying meanings and forces that contribute to teacher behaviors and strategies. Teacher educators can open a dialog with pre-service teachers based on the phrases they chose for juxtaposing teacher descriptions. Striking phrases such as “spewing facts,” “up on a pedestal,” “left by the wayside,” “yelled at us for being immature,” and the “8 a.m.-3 p.m. teacher syndrome,” illustrate the emotional significance with which the pre-service teachers have infused their beliefs about good and poor teaching practices. Their beliefs, including instances of negative memories, should be peeled back and examined along with their memories of good teacher practices to engage their thinking from dichotomous descriptions through to shared understandings of the complexities associated with teacher behaviors and practices.

**Link Current Beliefs to Future Practice**

Pre-service teachers’ juxtaposed descriptions foreshadow deeply held beliefs

---

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories***

---

about what pre-service teachers do and do not intend to emulate as future teachers. Their vision of an ideal teacher, while noble, can blindside pre-service teachers to the pressures with which they will struggle, especially in their early practice, that can jeopardize their best intentions and threaten to nudge them closer to being the teachers they don't want to be. Indeed, memories from the "apprenticeship of observation" can influence future practice in ways in which pre-service teachers may not be fully aware. In truth, imitation of both good and poor teachers may be lurking beneath the surface.

Future teachers, who intend to practice good teacher habits every day, may revert to expedient behavior, like their poor teachers, when faced with the pressures and stressors inherent in a new practice. Teacher educators can raise pre-service teachers' awareness of what they have observed that they did not like, and support their thoughtful examination of why they did not like particular practices. Such explicit awareness may help pre-service teachers avoid the imitation traps that stem from an "apprenticeship of observation."

For example, I observed a pre-service student teacher who taught a history lesson using no visual aids; that is, no maps, no overheads, no historical photographs, and no artifacts. Afterward, the student teacher was baffled to explain why his students were so bored with his lecture. When I reminded him about a previous teacher education class discussion and demonstration on visual aids as a teaching tool, he acknowledged that although we had studied the topic of visual aids, he was, instead, teaching in the same way that he had observed his own high school history teacher lecture. In other words, he was imitating a former teacher's poor practice rather than using concepts learned in teacher education to inform and develop his own more effective strategies.

Some would argue that once pre-service teachers have their own classrooms, they tend to forget what they learned in teacher education classes. Rather than think through each action, for better or worse, they say and do what they heard and saw as students growing up in school (Schimpf, 1990). It is useful, therefore, to systematically explore juxtaposed teacher memories, using such memories as teachable moments.

### ***Use Juxtapositions as Teachable Moments***

The pre-service teachers in this study were not prompted to juxtapose memories of good and poor teacher qualities, and those who did so may have used striking descriptions to make a point that the good teacher they chose was truly outstanding. Their memories gave me pause to consider the outcome if juxtaposed descriptions of their best and worst teachers been requested. At the same time, I recognized that as teacher educators, we need to use memories to prepare pre-service teachers with cushions of strength for the inevitable highs and lows of life in the classroom. After all, even their best teachers, those who they want to emulate, were not good all the time; and, even their worst teachers were not bad all the time.

We need to engage pre-service teachers in examining the whole gamut of good and poor teacher behaviors through a new, professional lens rather than a simplistic, student lens that sorts and evaluates past teachers. If, through an analysis of their juxtaposed dichotomous descriptions, pre-service teachers come to shared understandings of the underlying meanings behind teacher decision making and actions, they may enter their professional life in the classroom with greater insight.

## **Conclusion**

To build on the current research, future research might explore the extent and content of juxtapositions by asking pre-service teachers to write their memories of good teachers, and prompting them to include memories of poor teachers. Future research might also explore the usefulness of juxtaposed memories in teacher education courses by using such memories to open a dialog with pre-service teachers about their deeply held beliefs, and subsequently examining the content and insights of the resulting dialog to inform pre-service teacher development.

The usefulness of juxtaposed memories is realized when teacher educators press pre-service teachers to take an analytic stance toward dichotomous memories and to ponder and challenge their student perspectives through a professional lens for new insights. Rather than let juxtaposed memories remain dormant, such memories may be one tool for developing a shared understanding of the past with an intent to confront current beliefs about teaching that can inform future practice. While pre-service teachers will blossom on many days in their future classrooms, teacher educators can use juxtaposed memories as teachable moments to foreshadow the weeds that threaten despite new teachers' best efforts. At the same time, teacher educators can support pre-service teachers so that the inevitable challenges they will face are merely a series of experience steps that lead from where they are to where they aspire to be.

## **References**

- Ayers, W. (1993). *To teach: The journey of a teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ball, D. L., & Forzani, F. M. (2009). The work of teaching and the challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(5), 497-511.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Biddle, B. J. (1979). *Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors*. New York: Academic Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Calderhead, J., & Robson, M. (1991). Images of teaching: Student teachers' early conceptions of classroom practice. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 7, 1-8.
- Cameron, J. (Producer/Director) & Landau (Producer). (1997). *Titanic* [Motion picture]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century-Fox.

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Juxtaposed Teacher Memories***

---

- Clark, M. (2005). *Juxtapositions: Ideas for college writers*. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Clark, C. M., & Peterson, P. L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.) *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 255-296). New York: Macmillan.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Decker, L. E., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2008). Personality characteristics and teacher beliefs among pre-service teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 45-64.
- Feistritzer, C. E. (2011). *Profile of teachers in the U.S. 2011*. National Center of Education Information. Retrieved from www.edweek.org/media/pot2011.
- Fenstermacher, G., & Richardson, V. (2005). On making determinations of quality in teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 107(1), 186-213.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Goodman, J. (1988). Constructing a practical philosophy of teaching: A study of preservice teachers' professional perspectives. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 4, 121-137.
- Levin, B., & He, Y. (2008). Investigating the content and sources of teacher candidates' personal practical theories. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(1), 55-68.
- Liston, D., Whitcomb, J., & Borko, H. (2006). Too little or too much: Teacher preparation and the first years of teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(4), 351- 358.
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lortie, D. (2002). *Schoolteacher* (2nd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mead, J. V. (1992). *Looking at old photographs: Investigating the teacher tales that novice teachers bring with them* (Report No. NCRTL-RR-92-4). East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 346082).
- Minor, L. C., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Witcher, A. E., & James, T. L. (2002). Pre-service teachers' educational beliefs and their perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 96(2), 116-127.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nespor, J. (1987). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 19(4), 317-328.
- QSR International Pty Ltd. (2006). *NVivo* (Version 7.0) [Computer software]. Australia: www.qsrinternational.com.
- Schimpf, S. (1990, September). [Interview with Mary M. Kennedy, Director, National Center for Research on Teacher Education]. *Lansing State Journal*, p. 1D.
- Stowe, H. B. (1852). *Uncle Tom's cabin or life among the lowly*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Van Manen, M. (1989). By the light of anecdote. *Phenomenology and Pedagogy*, 9, 232-253.
- Weber, S. (1991, April). The narrative anecdote in teacher education. Paper presented at the International Society for Educational Biography, University of Toronto, Canada.
- Wilson, S. M. (1990). The secret garden of teacher education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72, 204-209.
- Yilmaz, H., & Sahin, S. (2011). Pre-service teachers' epistemological beliefs and conceptions of teaching. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(1), 73-88.